

**PREMARITAL USE OF FAMILY PLANNING:  
EFFECTS ON AGE AT MARRIAGE**

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## PREMARITAL USE OF FAMILY PLANNING: EFFECTS ON AGE AT MARRIAGE

### I. INTRODUCTION

Age at marriage has been identified as a key factor in the level of fertility, and has always been a debatable issue. In Thailand, as elsewhere, it is assumed that age at marriage has been affected by a variety of sociocultural factors. The relations of premarital use of family planning to age at marriage has however been unclear.

There is an abundance of material on the contraceptive practices of Thai women after marriage, but little is known about the sorts of experiences women have had with contraceptive devices before marriage, and whether these experiences, either good or bad, have affected their age at marriage. And the relations of age at marriage and premarital use of family planning have never been discussed before this study. It is thus the purpose of this report to examine the incidence of premarital use of family planning among a population in a Central Thai province, and the result that those practices have had on age at marriage.

Interestingly enough, the findings in this study suggest that premarital use of family planning is not an important factor in determining age at marriage. In the research village, family planning is considered to be the domain of married women. Single women are not supposed to use contraceptives since it would indicate that they are having a secret love affair. This belief serves as a cultural barrier to a possible rationale for using family planning to delay age at marriage.

In fact, there might be some underlying dimensions other than the prevalence of birth control that are involved in the decision to marry early or late, which is also the subject of this study.

The conceptual scheme employed in this study would be the "strategies of family formation" developed by Matras. He has suggested that there are four conceivable "strategies of family formation", combining either early or late marriage with either controlled or uncontrolled fertility as shown below (Van De Walle 1968).

Figure 1. Strategies of family formation

	<u>Uncontrolled Fertility</u>	<u>Controlled Fertility</u>
Early Marriage	Strategy A	Strategy B
Late Marriage	Strategy C	Strategy D

This study is proposed in response to a seemingly ambiguous relationship between contraception and unmarried women. Therefore, the focus of the study will be on premarital sexual behavior<sup>1</sup> and the use of family planning. It is postulated that the use of contraceptives before marriage would produce three possible consequences: (1) lack of success in using contraceptives in premarital sexual relations due to ignorance of techniques would cause pregnancies out of wedlock and subsequent early marriage or induced abortions; (2) success in using contraceptive will possibly result in late marriage; (3) and successful experiences with contraceptives could encourage earlier marriages since couples would be confident that they would be spared the burden of children in their first years of marriage.

The report will deal first with relevant research literature; secondly with methodology and fieldwork setting; thirdly with marriage and kin patterns; fourthly with family planning behavior; and finally a discussion on how society and culture govern an individual's behavior--sexual behavior in particular; and the result of such control on age at marriage.

## II. RELEVANT RESEARCH LITERATURE

Age at Marriage. A review of previous studies reveals that the age at marriage in Thailand, especially in the urban settings has increased. Chamrathrithirong (1979) in his analysis of the 1970 census data indicates that Thailand is in the process of going through a "transition" in nuptial behavior. There is a slight increase in age at marriage for both sexes between 1960 and 1970. In 1970, the average ages at marriage of men and women for the whole country were 24.7 and 21.9 respectively. A variation in age at marriage also occurs between

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<sup>1</sup>In terms of premarital sex, it is defined as follows: (1) the coitus the respondent had had with her occasional partners; (2) the coitus the respondent had had with her lover or her fiancé, and a relationship ended before the present marriage; (3) the coitus the respondent had with her present husband prior to marriage.

rural-urban areas. Women in rural areas tend to marry earlier than their urban counterparts. Of course, women in Bangkok and in the communities nearby are characterized by the highest age at marriage among women in Thailand. In two villages located 30 kilometers north and a little west of Bangkok where Foster (1975) did fieldwork, the average age at marriage was 24 for males and 21 for females.

Another study about age at marriage with special emphasis on rural and urban comparisons, however, found the differential between the two was slight. The author stated:

In rural areas, the most frequent age at marriage for boys is about twenty-two, and boys in urban areas marry about twenty-five years of age. Girls are considered marriageable at sixteen in the rural areas, but nearly all of them marry between age eighteen and twenty-one. Girls in cities may wait a year or so longer (Limanonda, 1976).

The average age at marriage of women in Bangkok who had been encouraged by family planning fieldworkers to receive family planning services at nearby health centers is 20 years (Yoddumnern, 1978). Even though it does not clearly indicate whether or not the contraceptives are one of the criteria in deciding whether to marry early or late, it does show age at marriage a little bit lower than other studies. However, due to the different dates of studies and the socio-economic characteristics of respondents, any conclusion as to the role of contraceptives in influencing age at marriage must be drawn with caution. It should not be assumed that a lower age at marriage is the result of access to family planning services.

Social and family structure. Any study of family life or family formation will not be adequately understood without reference to social and family structure. The concept related to Thai social structure is a controversial issue. There are two major streams of thought that have been developed and debated for the last 30 years. The first stream was led by Embree who, after a short stay in Bangkok, wrote a paper characterizing Thai society as a 'loosely structured social system' (Embree 1969). His theory gained such influence that "anthropologists working in Thailand have been curiously reluctant to elucidate or

explain Thai social system, since Embree's theory implies that the attempt would prove fruitless" (Potter 1977). According to the 'loosely structured' paradigm the structure of a Thai family is a loose one--without a strong sense of duty and obligation in family relations (Embree 1969). They do not have clear-cut rules for post-marital residence. The newly married couples determine where they will go to live on the basis of expediency rather than on the basis of some widely observed rule (Foster 1975). The second stream opposes Embree's theory and points out that the system itself is not formless, but is in fact rigid. The empirical evidence from several areas indicate that the rule of matrilocal residence generally characterizes Thai society (Foster 1975; Potter 1977; Delaney 1977; Kamnuansilp 1980). Ideally, after marriage, the newly married couple are to remain with the girls' parents and care for them for a while, or until a younger sister gets married and then in turn cares for the parents. The older married couple then may move out and establish their own household (Kamnuansilp 1980). One important result of this practice is the formation of a system of family development. This developmental cycle is an important aspect of Thai family structure and is tied directly to fertility, mortality, migration, child spacing, age at marriage, and other demographic considerations (Foster 1978).

In addition, the results from recent anthropological studies in the Northern region suggest that the Northern Thai possess matrilineal descent groups (Potter 1977; Delaney 1977). The most provocative proposition of Northern Thai social organization is the matrilineal ancestor cult which elucidates the nature of human relationships, as well as social structure (Potter 1977). In congruence with Potter's findings of ancestor spirit, Delaney (1977) explicitly indicated that the key role of the spirits is as guardians of the chastity and fertility of the females of the group. In a sense, the role of the ancestor spirits is to control women's sexual activities. They may cause sickness or other calamities if they are offended.

I am not specifically concerned here with the matrilineal descent idiom controversy, and further discussion of it would be out of place. I have referred to it in order to lead the reader to another issue which is our main concern here: ancestor cults and their control over women's sexual activities.

### III. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH SETTING

Methodology. The field-work was carried out during September and November 1978 in a village located in a province in the central plain in Thailand. The research team comprised two anthropologists, one social psychologist, one full-time and one part-time social scientist. The team spent five weeks in the village to familiarize itself with the village and to gain acceptance to investigate, observe, interpret and record substantive information.

The data to be used in this study was collected through participant observation, and informal and structured interviews of 60 subjects<sup>1</sup>. Due to the sensitivity of the topic, 15 key informants comprised of school teachers, a health worker, a government midwife, a traditional midwife, a traditional doctor, a village headman (kamnan) and his three assistants, a village registrar, and the knowledgeable villagers themselves were informally interviewed during their stay in the village. Intensive interviews were conducted with 45 women who were married 1-5 years<sup>2</sup> and the interviewers were guided by question schedules probing the married life and family planning behavior of respondents. Equally, we elicited their attitudes toward and practice of premarital intercourse and its consequences, along with the social and cultural factors that influenced the respondents' marriage behavior.

Research setting. The research village is in the northern central plain, about 350 kilometers north of Bangkok. It has approximately 1,700 inhabitants. Almost all of the villagers are Buddhists; only two families report being Catholics.

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<sup>1</sup>Most of the informants had at least four years of education, and a few had even more than four years.

<sup>2</sup>The village registrar gave us a list of the "available" forty-five newly married couples for the intensive interviews. "Available" here means the new couples whom we could reach. Only a few that were cultivating land could not be contacted due to time limitation.



As in many other parts of Thailand, the economy of the people in the research village is almost entirely agriculturally based--plain paddy rice and other cash crops. Farming in this village depends largely on rain, as there is no irrigation system in this area. Because of this, agricultural products are affected significantly by climatic fluctuations. For instance, in 1977, a year before the fieldwork of this study was conducted, the village suffered from a severe drought. As a result, no agricultural products were reaped. However, regardless of drought and flood which occur once in a while, the research village is quite self-sufficient as far as agricultural produce is concerned.

The research village has seen many changes in the present decade. These began with the opening of the road in 1972 which links up the village to many more developed places. Next, the police station, electricity and health center were brought in to the village in 1973, 1974 and 1975 respectively. With these facilities the village become a Tambol (sub-district) capital not only in administrative terms but in economic and health aspects as well. For instance, people no longer have to travel to town for treatment of minor ailments and may instead use the local health center. This health center supplies the contraceptive pills for those who need them and also provides family planning education from time to time.

Recent Village history. As historical documents of the village are not available at present, we can only refer to the oral recollection of older village residents. It originally was a Laotian village. The Laotian immigrants came from an adjacent province, south of the present village. When these Laotian people came is uncertain, but we think this must have taken place within the last one hundred years. These people identified themselves as 'Lao Krang' or 'Lao Khi Krang' who first came to Thailand from Laos. They believe their original homeland was somewhere near Vientianne, the present capital of Laos, and that they moved to Thailand during the war between Laos and China, more than one hundred years ago.

Some historians claim that the groups identified as Lao were mainly located in the North and in the Northeast. Their origin has been postulated as follows:

The Thai people of the North and Northeast regions are frequently referred to as Lao, both by foreigners and, in colloquial speech, by the Thai of Central Thailand. There are a number of reasons for the classification of the Northern Thai as a separate (Lao) ethnic group. Historically, they represent a wave of southward migration from China different from that of Thai settled in the Central Plain, and they have a tradition of political independence or semi-independence which lasted to the end of the nineteenth century. Culturally, they share a number of traits with present-day Kingdom of Laos; and such traits distinguish them to a degree from the Central Thai. Yet, in many important respects, the Thai of the North and Northeast are closely assimilated to behavior patterns characteristic of Thai society as a whole and increasingly share values and institutions common to Thailand as a nation (Moore 1974)

This passage is condensed, and yet informative in terms of history and culture of the Lao. Even though the Lao and the Thai do not share the same source of historical origin, their appearance is similar. Also, they both adapted religious concepts and beliefs from the Indian culture pervasive in Southeast Asia (Credner 1935 A01 Thailand A01 HRAF).

At present, the Lao are scattered in the Central Plains of Thailand; having moved down into the Central Region either voluntarily or involuntarily (as prisoners of war). These Thai-Lao villages are thus found in central provinces such as Sukhothai, Ayuthaya, Chainat, Supanburi, Singburi and Uthai Tanee.

The village studied here had been occupied for several decades before Thai and Chinese moved in about sixty years ago. A Thai old man whose family was the first Thai family that moved into this village recalled that he was only eight years old at that point. By that time, the village was already well established and the inhabitants were all Lao. There were two clusters of houses, one to the north and the other to the south with the temple in between. Along with the Thai, some Chinese also moved in. Therefore, at present the village consists of three ethnic groups: the Lao, the Thai and the Chinese. The Lao are still predominant.

In the beginning there was strong social segregation among the three groups. The Lao, for instance, did not marry the Thai or the Chinese. According to our key informants, who were respected persons both in terms of their social behavior and their knowledge, most of the Thai who first came to this place built their houses on the village periphery; they either bought the lands from the Lao or cleared the forest for new lands. They married among themselves and hardly mixed with the Lao and the Chinese. However, after several decades, ethnic separation among these groups became less rigid. Social intercourse became more and more important, and thus intermarriage followed. This phenomenon increased in the course of time. At present, the social mixture between the Lao and the Thai is such that it has become difficult to differentiate the Thai and the Lao, especially in the last two generations.

#### IV. MARRIAGE PATTERNS

Definition of Marriage. Marriage is generally defined as a socially legitimate sexual union, begun with a public announcement and undertaken with some idea of permanence; it is assumed with a more or less explicit marriage contract which spells out reciprocal rights and obligations between spouses, and between the spouses and their future children (Stephen 1964).

Marriage in Thailand is not necessarily marked by a formal ceremony. The dominant Theravada Buddhist tradition includes no wedding ritual. Those that are used are 'Brahmanistic' in origin. Frequently, a couple will simply start living together, although the bride-price is paid (Goldstein 1974 quoted from Riley and Prachaubmoh). When the village registrar chose forty-five new couples for us to interview, he simply defined marriage in terms of cohabitation. From his point of view, cohabitation is probably equated with full recognition of a couple as husband and wife. It does not matter to him whether they have passed through all stages of prescribed rites: engagements, wedding ceremonies, religious and civil marriages.

Marriage Patterns. To get a better understanding of how the people in the research village perceive marriage, it is necessary to explore the type of marriage that is most frequent.

Three types of marriage are observed by the villagers: marriage by traditional ceremony, marriage by elopement and 'latent' marriage. From time to time in this paper, the traditional marriage will be referred to as orthodox marriage, which is opposed to an unorthodox marriage (marriage by elopement and 'latent' marriage).

In the orthodox type of marriage, after a boy and a girl decide to marry each other, they will inform their parents or their elders. The boy's parents will then ask the girl's parents for their daughter, and the bride-price and marriage gifts, if any, will also be settled upon. Usually the wedding day starts with a religious ceremony in the morning in which the bride and groom with their relatives offer food to the Buddhist monks who later bless them. Besides the monks, the ancestor spirits are also offered foods. Ancestor spirits belonging to both the bride's and groom's families are invited by a specialist called a mau tham khwan (this literally means a specialist who "knows how to confirm or strengthen Khwan"<sup>1</sup>). Implicitly shown

Khwan is a Thai word identical in sound and meaning with the Chinese word for 'soul'. Owing to the adoption of a Pali word for 'soul' in Thai, the word khwan has lost its original meaning. Its present-day meaning is vague and denotes something definite but invisible in man. It gives health, prosperity, and happiness when it resides in him. But if its fickle nature causes it to leave and fly away, its owner will be ill and if it does not come back death is possible. Khwan may be translated into English as 'vital spirit'. At every formal turning point in a man's life and on other appropriate occasions, the ceremony of tham khwan is performed (Anuman Rajadon 1961).

in this ceremony is the notion of keeping harmony with the supernatural power. This rite is thus performed to strengthen health, and to give prosperity and happiness to the young married couple.

After the Buddhist and animistic rites, there is usually a ritual called Rod Nam Sang (Rod = to pour, Nam Seng = lustral water) in which elder relatives of both sides pour lustral water on the bride's and groom's hands which have been joined by holy string. This rite is sometimes simplified and called 'to tie the bride's and groom's hands with holy string' (or Poog Kau Meu). The rite is equivalent to a marital contract and thus signifies marriage. Consequently, the people in the research village use the words "marriage" and Poog Kau Meu interchangeably.

The feast is usually held in the evening of the wedding day. Among the Thai, there is no strict rule of when the marriage should be consummated. It depends on the individuals. The Lao, on the other hand, reported that the marriage should not be consummated during the first three or seven days of marriage. To make the rule effective, the groom has to wait until three-seven days before he can move into the bride's house. The reason for this practice is not clear. They simply say "the bride and groom should get acquainted with each other first." It is reasonable to arrange a marriage in which the bride and groom do not know each other well. In the research village, however, only a few villagers report having had arranged marriages. The remaining have chosen their own spouses.

Marriage by elopement usually takes place when the boy's and girl's relationship is hindered in such a way that a conventional marriage ceremony is not possible. Such hindrances may be the parents' objection to the poor socio-economic status of the boy's family, or other social disagreements such as the boy being too young, or not having been ordained as yet. In this form of marriage, the boy and girl agree to run away secretly from their parents on a particular day or night. After a few days or weeks they send a message to their parents proposing that the boy apologize to the girl's parents for breaching traditional rules; and

that he or his family will pay a certain amount of money as demanded. After the bride-price is settled, a day for a simplified form of wedding rite or the rite of apology is fixed. It is usually arranged three-ten days after the negotiation. On the "wedding day", there are two major rites to be performed: the rite "to tie the boy's and girl's hand with holy string"<sup>1</sup>; and the rite to appease ancestor spirits of both sides. When the young couple has gone through these short-cut stages, the boy is legally and socially accepted as the son-in-law.

This phenomenon is not of recent origin. It was cited a long time ago as one type of marriage. Thompson (1941), for example, mentioned that "elopements are frequent among the humble people and are easily forgiven by the amiable Siamese". However, in the village studied, elopement is found only among the Thai.

The 'latent' marriage, on the other hand, is found to be fairly common among the Lao. It is interesting enough to cite here that the Lao's courting system, known as aeo sao "going out to visit girls" is similar to that practised in the Northern Thai villages. The courting system has been described as follows:

Parents of marriageable girls will permit the girls to sit on the outer verandah and chat with the boys. The authority of the parents, however, and through them the spirit ancestors, is never absent, and can be seen in a number of fairly strict rules governing verandah courtships....When a young man has courted a young woman and privately gained her acceptance to become his wife, moreover, he deliberately sets out to "wrong the spirits" or phit phi (Delaney 1977).

In many cases, the practice of aeo sao leads easily to 'latent' marriage. If the man sets out to spend the night with the girl, he will "wrong the spirits" or phit phi. The girl's parents, on knowing

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<sup>1</sup>They do not call them 'bride' and 'groom' in this case.



It is quite clear that the unorthodox marriages are fast and simple. One can eliminate most of the ceremonies, bride-price, and the cost of the wedding ceremony. Society itself provides alternatives for the couples who cannot afford the bride-price and the expense of a wedding ceremony. In other words, the lovers do not have to wait a long time until they have enough money to get married. In this sense, the elopement and the 'latent' marriage are equivalent to a bargaining system--bargaining the 'bride-price'. Interestingly enough, it is found that the majority of people who married at a fairly young age--lower than 20--did not have the traditional wedding ceremony. They either ran away together or had the 'latent' marriage, and had the announcements afterwards. Also it was found that the average age at marriage of respondents and their husbands were nineteen and twenty-one years respectively.

The reasons for elopement and having a 'latent' marriage were given as follows: (1) the parents did not approve of the boyfriends or girlfriends. In the case of boys, they would not be approved if they had not been ordained yet. On the other hand, the boys' parents might not approve of girls who are not hardworking and those who are not willing to work in the fields; (2) the girls' parents might ask for a high bride-price that the boys' parents could not afford. We have been told that elopements occurred every year, particularly during years when the village suffered from drought or famine. A year before this fieldwork was done (1977), the research village suffered from the worst drought in twenty-five years and there were four couples who ran away together. The boys did not have money for the bride-price and wedding ceremony. Thus, the unorthodox marriage was their only way out.

Since marriage in this village is signified by the rite "to tie the boys' and girls' hands with holy string", any sexual relationship before this rite would be technically called premarital sex. However, this conclusion might not be accurate, since the information obtained from the fieldwork does not reveal this



phenomena. The Thai people in general are very sensitive to this topic. It is not easy to obtain information from the respondents directly. Only one case reported that they ran away together because they had premarital sex. (It was the husband who gave us this information). However, the information obtained from other villagers indicates that in many cases, premarital sex led to elopement and the 'latent' marriage.

The practices that lead to unorthodox marriage in the research village reflect both the importance of virginity, and a precaution against child bearing out of wedlock, as well. As has been mentioned before, the bride-price is drastically reduced in the case of an unorthodox marriage. The bride-price paid for remarriage is also as low as for an unorthodox one. This indicates that the bride-price is viewed as being relative to the value of the virginity of bride.

It was also found that the duration of engagements in this village are relatively short, ranging from one week to six months. Only one person, however, reported that she was engaged for six months. Normally, informants were engaged for one-two months. The parents do not want their sons or daughters to be engaged for a long time. Their major reason--fear of the young couple running away--fosters the idea that the engagement encourages premarital sex. However, a short period of engagement could cover up premarital conception, if it ever occurred.

In a society with a rule against premarital sex, it is hard to know how faithfully this rule is followed. When the key informants were asked whether or not the courting system of aeo sao would be a chance for boys and girls to "wrong the spirits"; the answer is no. The spirits are, of course, those of the ancestors who watch and guard the behavior of descendents. However, if this rule has been violated, there is another rule that could make such sexual behavior possible. That is, in all cases, such behavior would immediately be followed by marriage. It is not considered to be morally wrong since they can marry each other afterwards.

One wonders what would happen if the man refused to take responsibility and did not want to marry the girl. In the research village there was no case reported where the man did not take some action. However, there is one case where the girl's father turned down the boy who slept with his daughter. His reason was that the boy was lazy and did not know how to earn a living, and he did not want to take a chance with his daughter's future.

The question is, what are the hidden dimensions that force young men to follow the customary codes of conduct? Do they have choices? There are a number of ways to explain this phenomenon.

First, one must look at the process of mate selection. Often it is the boy's intention to marry his girlfriend, but he cannot afford the bride-price and the cost of the wedding ceremony. It is the culture that provides the way out for couples who cannot afford the bridewealth and the wedding ceremony. There are, however, reports that in some cases the girl's parents on knowing that their daughter slept with a man, the next morning will try to catch the boy or take something of his, such as clothes, for evidence. They then send a message to the boy's parents demanding that proper action be taken.

Second, one should look at the importance of dependence and obedience. As has been pointed out before in this report, couples who have an unorthodox form of marriage are fairly young. Their economic well-being still depends entirely on their families. In this sense, the boys' decisions are partially controlled by their parents. Besides, the Thais, from training since they are young, are taught to be obedient to their parents' or their elders' wishes. Thus, most Thai youths raised in a culture where obedience is highly valued, tend to unconsciously conform to the needs and desires of their elders (Mole 1973).

Third, we must consider the ancestor cult. Even though the people are not aware of how the supernatural powers direct their behavior in daily activities, they do show respect to those spirits. Almost all houses in the village have a spirit house,

and food is offered to the spirits everyday. In every transitional stage of life--birth, entering into the monkhood, marriage and death--there is an animistic ceremony performed along with the Buddhist religious ceremony. The spirits are sometimes blamed for sickness or death because they are not satisfied with what the people have done. For example, if the people neglect to feed them, or promise to feed them with a certain kind of food on a certain day but forget to do so, or violate moral principles, they run the risk of trouble ranging from minor sickness to disaster. Actually, they are not conscious of this spiritual power until they feel that they are offending them. Appropriate actions are thus undertaken to please the spirits. In the case of sexual behavior, the young couple, especially the boy, must realize that their behavior offends the spirits and they cannot deny it. In this sense, the notion of supernatural power serves as one of the social sanctions in the research village.

However, the cultural mechanisms do not necessarily work all the time. There was one case reported of rape in the research village. It happened eight months before we did the fieldwork. The girl was eighteen years old, and the man was about sixty years old. He refused to marry the girl, so the case was brought to the headman (Kamnan). The man was fined; and the case was settled. In this case, the man was blamed for violating the moral code of conduct, and he could not be regarded as a respected man. The girl was not blamed since the case was brought into the open, and everyone in the community knew what had happened to her.

Attitudes are different if the girl gets pregnant without a husband or an identified lover. Such a pregnancy is called tong paa (tong - pregnant, paa - bush, forest); this means an unwed pregnancy or pregnancy resulting from a premarital love affair being carried out with secrecy. This situation embarrasses the girl and, of course, her parents. The parents might send the girl away until the illegitimate child is born, or try to find a way to terminate the pregnancy. The only means of taking care of the unwanted pregnancy is through an induced abortion.

From the conclusions of the phenomena described above, and from the direct information obtained from key informants, it is plausible to conclude that premarital sex is condemned in the village. However, society provides a way to legalize the situation. To bring into the open what is hidden or might embarrass is a salient feature of the process to control deviations within a group (Turner 1957). The processual form of 'social drama', coined by Turner (op. cit.) could be used to explain unorthodox marriage in the research village. The first phase is the breach of regular norms. The young couple is violating marital customs by either running away together or having a 'latent' marriage. In the second phase, there is a crisis following a breach of regular norms. In the case of an elopement, when parents learn that their children have run away together, they would search for them and demand that they return. In some cases, the boy sends a message to the girl's parents that they would like to come back and apologize. In the case of a 'latent' marriage, knowing this the next morning, the girl's parents send a message to the boy's parents demanding appropriate action. The third phase is called a redressive mechanism. At this point, there are negotiations between the girl's and the boy's parents--negotiations about the bride-price and the day for the wedding rite. The last phase--reintegration--is the day of the wedding rite. On this day the bride-price is paid; the boy and girl perform the marriage rites. After this, the boy is allowed to move into the girl's house as her husband. Implicit in the notion of reintegration is the concept of social equilibrium. This concept involves the view that a social system is made up of interrelated units, of persons and groups, whose interests are somehow maintained in balance; and further, that when a disturbance occurs, readjustments are made which have the effect of restoring the balance (Turner 1957).

Putting all of these factors together, one can clearly see how a society such as this--small, remote and dependent on kinship network--could cope with or control individual behavior that might upset relationships among the members of the society.

#### V. FAMILY PLANNING BEHAVIOR

Single Women: Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices of Family Planning. In the research village, family planning is considered to be the domain of married women. Single women are not supposed to use contraceptives since it would indicate that they are having a secret love affair. Unmarried women might have heard about family planning, but they are forbidden to show their curiosity about it. Information obtained from the government midwife and health worker in the research village also confirm this phenomena: they provide family planning education only to married couples. In some cases, unmarried women came to consult the health worker about their irregular or abnormal menstruations. When the health worker suggests they take the contraceptive pills; they refuse to do so. They feel shy and are afraid of gossip. Family planning is just not the domain of single women at all. They may, however, discuss family planning more freely after marriage.

The information obtained from the village health center (as of October 1978) indicates that women aged 21-25 are the largest group of family planning current acceptors (34 per cent); the second largest group is women aged 26-30 (21 per cent); the percentages of current acceptors among women aged 15-20 and 31-35 are close (15 per cent and 16 per cent respectively); 12 per cent or current acceptors are women aged 36-40; only 4 per cent aged 41-45 are current acceptors. According to the record, all of them are married women.

Family planning services (i.e. pills) were introduced in the research village about ten years ago. As elsewhere in Thailand, family planning has been integrated into the health care delivery system. The health center is the major place in the village that supplies and educates people about family planning. There are three types of family planning motivation carried out by the health center officers: individuals; small groups; and mass motivation.

1. Individual motivation. The health center officers--government midwife, health worker--go out and visit each household once a week. Along with other health subjects, they try to persuade the villagers to limit family size. When the patients come to see them at the health center they do the same as when they visit the house. However, they do not talk about family planning to everybody. They talk only to those they consider to be "appropriate" persons. "Appropriate" here simply means--married men or women with 2-3 children. The health center officers do not try to talk about family planning to single women. It is culturally understood that single women should not have had any sexual intercourse and it thus implies that they are not permitted to use contraceptives. To try to educate single women about family planning is insulting to them.

2. Small group motivation. The health center officers always visit the coffee shops or small food markets (where the people gather around and talk), and they might bring up this issue sometimes.

3. Mass motivation. When there is a congregation of people in one place, such as on festive occasions, they motivate the people to adopt family planning by showing movies, playing music or some other entertainment.

In this type of motivation, the single women can be exposed to family planning, too. In addition, they might have heard about family planning from their married relatives.

This yields a significant fact: even though they are not allowed to use the contraceptives, they are aware that the contraceptives prevent pregnancy. Whether or not they have accurate knowledge, however, is another significant issue that needs further study.

Premarital Coitus. For Thai women, premarital sex is a very sensitive topic. The research team did not obtain direct information from the respondents about their premarital sex. We did obtain, however, information through other villagers. Though coitus with occasional partners is not common, it certainly does exist in the research village. The relationship could end either when the girl marries another man to prevent the child being born out of wedlock, or in a secretly performed induced abortion. This data as such suggests that family planning has never been used among single women or used without success. Usually, their partners are men outside the village who come to live in the village temporarily either for work or for a visit. In a sense, cultural mechanisms mentioned before could not cope with the outsiders who just come and go. They would work effectively within their own boundaries, and among their own membership only.

Another area of interest is coitus a girl has had with a fiancé, where the relationship ended before getting married. It has been mentioned before that in the research village the engagement period is quite short. It varies from one week to six months. Never has a case been reported where the engagement lasted for over a year. Consequently, there was never a case reported where an engagement was ended before marriage .

With regards to coitus the girl has had with her present husband prior to marriage, it is found that in the research village, this type of relationship occurred more frequently than any other type. The information, however, could not be obtained directly from the respondents, even though the 'elopement' and

'latent' marriage can be used as a possible indicator of premarital sex. It is from other villagers that we obtained the information relating to premarital sexual behavior. There are a few cases where villagers know for sure that a couple has had premarital sex, and has used contraceptive pills to prevent pregnancy. But rumor of, and gossip about their sexual behavior spread throughout the village. The girl's parents are understandably not happy about this. They thus demand the boys' parents take action; and usually the marriage follows immediately after the negotiation between the boy's and girl's parents. In this case, rumor and gossip work effectively as social control and premarital sex with or without family planning results in early marriage. It is thus indicated that in a rural area where kinship ties are strong, the traditional marital customs are highly regarded. Where the value of virginity is highly prized, and where premarital sex is condemned, family planning is the domain of the married couple. It is viewed as a tool to stop and/or space the birth of children. According to Burnight and Leoprapi (1976), among rural Thai women the non-contraceptors have a more favorable attitude towards abortion than did those who are practising some form of contraception. It is thus hypothesized that contracepting is a deviation from customary behavior and that abortion is the traditional means of taking care of an unwanted pregnancy.

## VI. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS.

In this study, it was found that premarital use of family planning is not an important factor in determining age at marriage. Age at marriage is influenced by many interwoven factors. Breaking of village norms (having premarital sex) is of course one important factor that affects age at marriage. In this case, marriage is not for preventing the unwed pregnancy only, but also to save face



for the girl's parents. Its ultimate purpose is to support young couples in having a respectable sexual outlet. In a society in which the girls are not allowed to become pregnant before marriage, and are not allowed to use contraceptives, such as in this village, the elopement or 'latent' marriage seems to be the best solution to accommodate the boys and girls. These phenomenon no doubt lead to early age at marriage.

There are also other marital customs that are involved in encouraging early age at marriage: these are the rule of post-nuptial residence; and the demand for labor in the family.

Post-nuptial residence. Matrilocal residence is the rule and is widely observed by the villagers. Normally, the newly married couple will live with the wife's parents for a while. Ideally, they will stay at least a year, or until a younger sister marries and her husband moves in, then the older couple can leave to establish their own household.

The first stage of this rule--that the younger couple stay with the wife's parents--is fostered in different ways: merit-making, socialization, and recognition of economic realities.

In terms of merit-making, a Thai male can make great merit for his parents by entering the monkhood. This is considered to be a magnificent way to show gratitude to his parents. A Thai female, on the other hand, can express her gratitude by taking care of the parents. This would be ideally accomplished if, after marriage, she and her husband were to remain with her parents and take care of them for a while, or at least until a younger sister marries and then in turn cares for the parents. The original married couple can then move out and establish their own household. This notion of a developmental cycle can partially explain matrilocal residence.

In terms of socialization, it has been explained that during the stay with parents, the newly married couples learn about family life and how to fulfill their family role.

In terms of family economics, the newly married couple does not accumulate enough wealth to establish their own household. The requirement for couples to stay with parents after marriage would certainly reduce the economic worries of young couples and thus partially influence early marriage.

There are, however, other implications for young couples who live with the wives' parents. During their stay the married couples depend economically on the wives' parents. They work with them in the rice field and help with household chores. It is not surprising, then, that the authority of the wife's father over his married daughter and her spouse is quite strong. He can influence them in many respects including how many children they should have, whether or not they use contraceptives, and what kind of contraceptives they should use. Even if the couple want to move out and establish a new home, they cannot do it without permission of the woman's father. When they move out they have to be on their own. They cannot depend on the wife's parents any longer. That would lessen the power of the wife's parents over the married couple. At this point, the man becomes the head of his own household. The developmental cycle will start all over again when his own children are old enough to get married and have their spouses move in.

In the second stage of the cycle, a younger sister marries and her husband moves in and the older couple moves out to establish their own household. This is explained as follows:

(a) it is the younger sisters' turn to make merit by taking care of the parents; (b) if the older child and spouse did not move out, the house would be too crowded. The crowded house would create problems. Some informants stated that the two 'tigers' (son-in-law) should never be in the same cave.

In the third stage of the developmental cycle, the youngest couple stay with the parents permanently and inherit the house. In this case the man has to wait a long time to become a head of household. He has to wait until his father-in-law retires from farming and household activities, or until they inherit some properties. Then he would take the place of his father-in-law.

Demand for labor in the family. Another major factor that influences early age at marriage is demand for labor in the family. There is an ambiguity of residence rules here. It has been observed that to establish one's own nuclear family is the ideal. A man typically wishes to set up his own household and work in his own fields. The older married couple might not wait until the younger sibling marries. In that case, especially when there is only one unmarried daughter or son left in the house, he or she might be persuaded to marry early. The goal is simply to bring workers into the house. In this situation, if it is the youngest son, there would be negotiations for a girl to move into her husband's house.

To this point, one can see that an individual's decision to marry is influenced by three major sectors that constitute the social system: the individual's emotions and thoughts, social relations in the village and family, and social values which are reinforced through ritual. These three elements serve as a frame of reference for individual action. Age at marriage of the women in the village studied is thus governed by that frame of reference. Any behavior of intention derived from individual's need could not work without examining the other two factors. In the case of premarital use of family planning, it is still in the individual's domain. It has not been accepted or transformed into a social institution and/or social values yet. It thus has not affected age at marriage at all.

## VII. CONCLUSION

In this study four dimensions of family life have been examined: marriage patterns; family behavior; premarital sex; and family planning behavior. It was found that three types of marriage occur in the research village: the traditional wedding ceremony, marriage by elopement, and 'latent' marriage. The traditional one is observed by both the Thai and the Lao. Marriage by elopement is found only among the Thais. Similarly, 'latent' marriage is widely practised among the Laos. By "marriage", they simply mean cohabitation which is symbolically marked by the rite "to tie the bride's and groom's hands with holy string". Such a rite signifies marriage. The people in the research village thus use the words "marriage" and poog kau meu (to tie the bride's and groom's hands with holy string) interchangeably. After marriage, the newly married couple is expected to stay with the wife's parents for a while, or until a younger sister marries. One important result of this rule of matrilocal residence is the formation of a family developmental cycle. It is directly related to several basic population processes (e.g. age at marriage, fertility, and spacing of children).

Among the people in the research village, birth control and single women are not connected in any approved way. Birth control is predominantly practised after marriage by married women to limit their family size. It does not belong in the world of unmarried women. In other words, unmarried women are not permitted to use birth control. They are not expected to become pregnant before marriage either. Therefore, one solution to support them is to see that they marry early.

This study was designed to test the hypotheses that premarital sex without family planning would result in early marriage, and that premarital sex with family planning would affect age at marriage. It was found that premarital sex either with or without family planning would result in early marriage. The use of

contraceptives does not determine the age of marriage of women in the research village. There are a number of dimensions that govern family behavior of the villagers and sexual behavior in particular. The first major factor is that family planning is not in the cognitive or social world of unmarried women.

The second factor is social pressure. In a small community, gossip works as a mechanism for social control and sanctioning misbehavior. In this sense, premarital sex is forced by gossip to move toward a form of sexual activity that is respectable--marriage.

The third factor is the influence of ancestor spirits who might cause sickness or other calamities if they are offended. Premarital sex, of course, offends the spirits. Spirits here support social norms in the society. It thus means that the young couple having premarital sex is violating marital norms. The best way to correct this behavior is to bring it into the open. In this sense, to make an apology to the girl's parents functions as a means to bring hidden or embarrassing behavior into the open. The wedding rite that comes after is the reentry of the young couple into the social life of the village as respectable married persons. The wedding rite in this sense serves as the mechanism to maintain social solidarity, supporting the 'moral order' and mitigating deviant behavior.

These three major factors cooperatively block a possible rationale for using family planning to delay age at marriage. Early age at marriage of the women in the research village is the result of many socio-cultural factors: the rule against premarital sex, the rule against an unwed pregnancy, the ancestor cults, lack of economic burden, and need for labor in the family. All these factors work as a cultural barrier against the use of contraceptives by unmarried women.

The findings of this study suggest that any consideration to extend family planning education to unmarried women should be taken with caution. A considerable number of studies concerning those socio-cultural factors that are interwoven into social and family life should be carried out. One should also keep in mind that family planning does not proceed by replacing or destroying "tradition". Instead, it is shaped by constant interaction with existing cultural forms. Contraceptives effectively used among married women, for example, are a deviation from customary behavior of induced abortion as a means of taking care of an unwanted pregnancy. Similarly, among unmarried women, family planning education would gain more acceptance if it has been transformed into customary behavior.

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# SEAPRAP

## THE SOUTHEAST ASIA POPULATION RESEARCH AWARDS PROGRAM

### PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

- \* To strengthen the research capabilities of young Southeast Asian social scientists, and to provide them with technical support and guidance if required.
- \* To increase the quantity and quality of social science research on population problems in Southeast Asia.
- \* To facilitate the flow of information about population research developed in the program as well as its implications for policy and planning among researchers in the region, and between researchers, government planners and policy makers.

### ILLUSTRATIVE RESEARCH AREAS

The range of the research areas include a wide variety of research problems relating to population, but excludes reproductive biology. The following are some examples of research areas that could fall within the general focus of the Program:

- \* Factors contributing to or related to fertility regulation and family planning programs; familial, psychological, social, political and economic effects of family planning and contraception.
- \* Antecedents, processes, and consequences (demographic, cultural, social, psychological, political, economic) of population structure, distribution, growth and change.
- \* Family structure, sexual behaviour and the relationship between child-bearing patterns and child development.
- \* Inter-relationships between population variables and the process of social and economic development (housing, education, health, quality of the environment, etc).
- \* Population policy, including the interaction of population variables and economic policies, policy implications of population distribution and movement with reference to both urban and rural settings, and the interaction of population variables and law.
- \* Evaluation of on-going population education programs and/or development of knowledge-based population education program.

- \* Incentive schemes — infrastructures, opportunities; overall economic and social development programs.

### SELECTION CRITERIA

Selection will be made by a Program Committee of distinguished Southeast Asian scholars in the social sciences and population. The following factors will be considered in evaluating research proposals:

1. relevance of the proposed research to current issues of population in the particular countries of Southeast Asia;
2. its potential contribution to policy formation, program implementation, and problem solving;
3. adequacy of research design, including problem definition, method of procedure, proposed mode of analysis, and knowledge of literature;
4. feasibility of the project, including time requirement; budget; and availability, accessibility, and reliability of data;
5. Applicant's potential for further development.

### DURATION AND AMOUNT OF AWARDS

Research awards will be made for a period of up to one year. In exceptional cases, requests for limited extension may be considered. The amount of an award will depend on location, type and size of the project, but the maximum should not exceed US\$7,500.

### QUALIFICATIONS OF APPLICANTS

The Program is open to nationals of the following countries: Burma, Indonesia, Kampuchea, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. Particular emphasis will be placed on attracting young social scientists in provincial areas.

Applications are invited from the following:

- \* Graduate students in thesis programs
- \* Faculty members
- \* Staff members in appropriate governmental and other organizations.

Full-time commitment is preferable but applicants must at least be able to devote a substantial part of their time to the research project. Advisers may be provided, depending on the needs of applicants.